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Teaching Strategies: How to Explain the History and Themes of Abstract Expressionism to High School Students Using the Integrative Model

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2014

**Kirk
Maynard**

HONS 497

**[TEACHING STRATEGIES: HOW
TO EXPLAIN THE HISTORY AND
THEMES OF ABSTRACT
EXPRESSIONISM TO HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS USING THE
INTEGRATIVE MODEL]**

Abstract:

The purpose of my thesis is to create a guideline for teachers to explain art history to students in an efficient way without many blueprints and precedence to guide them. I have chosen to focus my topic on Abstract Expressionism and the model that I will be using to present the concept of Abstract Expressionism will be the integrated model instructional strategy. The integrated model will serve as the guide to creating well crafted art history lessons in the classroom. This integrated model will also be laid out and summarized in a lesson plan designed to give the teacher direction in the lesson presented.

Introduction

Art history's importance in the educational curriculum has been the source of debate in the art community for many years. In fact, this debate can be seen as far back as the 1950's when prominent art historian and educator Wallace Rosenbauer wrote about the importance of art history in the educational curriculum. In his article entitled *Art in Secondary Schools*, Rosenbauer says:

*"The history of art is visual education. Even youngsters believe what they see and the visual arts can teach them to see better. They deal with exactly the qualities that adolescents value most highly. When seen in paintings people of other times and periods can seem alive and real."*¹

Although Rosenbauer made a strong case for the importance of art history in the art educational curriculum, his words have rarely been heeded in the 21st century. This is what makes my thesis unique. It delves into an area of art education that is rarely touched by instructional strategies or art teachers. Art history is often neglected in high school curricula because of the importance many educators have placed on art application in the classroom. In fact, if you were to look at the "Michigan State Standards for Visual Art Education"², they would read as follows:

¹ Rosenbauer, Wallace. *Art in Secondary Schools*. College Art Journal , Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn, 1954) , pp. 42-45

² "Michigan Content Standards and Working Draft Benchmarks for Visual Arts". *Arts Education*. Pg 1-17.

Retrieved from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ARTS_Standards_11402_7.pdf

1. *Apply materials, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that personal intentions are carried out in artworks.*
 2. *Create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.*
 3. *Describe the origins of specific images and ideas and explain why they are of value in their artwork and in the work of others.*
 4. *Apply and adapt subjects, symbols, and creative ideas in artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life.*
 5. *Demonstrate an improved ability to integrate structures, characteristics and principles to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art.*
 6. *Create media productions that demonstrate knowledge, contexts, values, and aesthetics.*
-

As you can see from the list presented above, most of the standards that Michigan has presented for art education curriculum deals with the application of art mediums to create works of art. The only standard that gives leeway to talk about and analyze art history in the classroom is the one that deals with describing “*the origins of specific images and ideas and explain why they are of value in their artwork and in the work of others*”. These limited guidelines for teaching art history in the classroom leave an educational void that I hope to fill through my thesis paper.

The purpose of my thesis paper is to create a lesson plan for teachers to explain art history to students in an efficient way without many blueprints and precedence to guide them. I have chosen to focus on Abstract Expressionism. And the model that I will be using to present the concept of Abstract Expressionism (through liberation) will be the integrated model instructional strategy.

Methodology

The basis for the integrative model was developed by Eggen and Kauchak in 2006. Don Kauchak is an educator who has worked in the educational system for over 40 years. He has published his work in many scholarly journals such as *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Educational Leadership*, and *Journal of Educational Research*. Kauchak has also been a principal investigator who examined evaluation practices in schools across America. On the other hand, Paul Eggen, (the co-creator of this instructional strategy) has worked in the educational system for over 35 years as a consultant to America's public schools in over 12 states.

The integrated model is an instructional strategy that allows teachers to engage students with the material by linking different concepts together through contrasts and comparisons. This model also allows teachers to make generalizations about the main concept (Abstract Expressionism) through these links. Teachers only have a limited amount of time in the classroom to talk about very complex topics, but I believe that I can use the integrated model to sufficiently cover what I want to teach in this one small area of art history. I checked other instructional models to see if they would be able to work well with the topic that I wanted to teach (which was Abstract Expressionism). However they did not fit. The first model I looked at was the cooperative learning model. This model is designed to allow students to work in groups where each student in the group has a particular task they have to complete. But this model would require a functional understanding of the subject matter. And the topic that I am presenting on Abstract Expressionism would be a relatively new topic to most high school

students who don't get exposed to art history in public schools. So this model would not have worked. The Socratic inquiry model is another instructional model that I looked at for this paper. This model also requires students to analyze texts in a group setting with other students. However this method also requires students to know the material ahead of time and is not suitable for introducing a topic in the beginning of class to students who have no prior knowledge of what they are learning. So I decided to stick with the Integrated Model.

Here are the steps to the integrative model: ³

1. *Planning for the integrative model.* Find a topic and keep the main generalizations of that topic in mind for the lesson.
2. *Describe and search for patterns in a data set.* Use information to predict a common denominator among concepts and information.
3. *Explain identified similarities and differences.* Analyze information so you can compare and contrast the main points of what you have learned.
4. *Hypothesize what would happen under different circumstances.* Apply current knowledge to prior knowledge.
5. *Make broad generalizations about the topic and discussion.* By grouping together common similarities and differences in academic information, what conclusions can you draw on a particular topic?

Benefits of the Integrative Model: ⁴

³ Gunter, Mary Alice, Thomas H. Estes, and Susan L. Mintz. *Instruction: A Models Approach*. Boston: Pearson A and B, 2007. Print.

- It helps students get a firm grasp of the main ideas of a lesson.
- It helps students understand textbook jargon through the breaking down of complex information.
- The teacher is able to control the material and subject information he/she teaches because the data they use for the integrative model is created by them.

Now that the integrated model has been described, it is time to put this model into a lesson plan on Abstract Expressionism:

⁴ Gunter, Mary Alice, Thomas H. Estes, and Susan L. Mintz. *Instruction: A Models Approach*. Boston: Pearson A and B, 2007. Print.

Results/Data for the Integrated Model (this will be the longest section of my paper)

Lesson Plan for the Integrated Model (Abstract Expressionism)

Class: Art Appreciation

Teacher: Kirk Maynard

Lesson Descriptors	Standards/Benchmarks	Lesson Objectives/Outcomes
Subject: Visual Arts Topic: Abstract expressionism in Art History Audience: 9 th -12 th grade	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand Abstract Expressionism through the idea of “liberation”.2. Analyze and describe the formal characteristics of a work of art and design in Abstract Expressionism.3. Critically observe a work of art to evaluate and respond to the artist’s intent using art vocabulary and terminology.4. Observe and describe artwork in the Abstract Expressionist	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. TSWBAT develop their opinion on the validity and aesthetics of Abstract Expressionist Art during a class discussion.2. TSWBAT fully recognize the themes and importance of Abstract Expressionist art on a worksheet given by the teacher.3. TSWBAT understand the applications of elements and principles of art into the Abstract Expressionist movement.

	<p>movement with respect to history and culture.</p> <p>5. Observe artwork from the perspective of previous art movements that came before it.</p>	
Technology I will use to teach this lesson	Provisions for Diverse Learners	
Powerpoint presentation	<p>LD (learning disabled students): Have student repeat the given assignment and repeat the steps for completion.</p> <p>GT (gifted students): Assign as a Peer Buddy to ESL and LD students.</p> <p>ESL (English as second language students): Have student explain the assignments given and list the steps to you.</p>	

Instructional Phases for the Lesson Plan

Phase 1: Focus (anticipatory set, warmup)

For bell work, there will be a worksheet given to the students that will show a picture of one of Jackson Pollock's works. Here is an example of one of his works (entitled *Blue Poles*) created in 1952:



The students will be asked to get into groups of two and answer the following questions:

What are the first four words you think of when you look at this painting?

Do you think this is art?

This assignment will help me assess what the students know about Abstract Expressionism and if they understand the meaning behind the work being shown.

After the assignment above, I will discuss the answers that the groups come up with and I will state the purpose of the lesson. The purpose of the lesson is to observe and understand artworks in the Abstract Expressionist movement with respect to history and culture.

Phase 2: Construction (students build meaning)

The students will then be able to build meaning from this lesson from a direct lecture based on the integrated model:

Integrated Model Application:

Identify the topic: Abstract expressionism in history.

Describe, compare, and search for patterns in a data set:

What are some of the things that make up the Abstract Expressionist movement?

What type of messages are Abstract Expressionists sending to their audience? And why?

What are some of the purposes of Abstract Expressionism?

Explain identified similarities and differences:

How did Abstract Expressionism liberate the artist aesthetically from previous art movements?

How did Abstract Expressionism liberate the artist from the order of previous art movements?

What does Abstract Expressionism take away from other art movements?

What themes of existentialism are present in the work of Abstract Expressionism? How were these themes liberating for the Abstract Expressionist?

How does minimalism liberate the Abstract Expressionist?

Hypothesize what would happen under different conditions:

Do you think the move to modernism through Abstract Expressionism would have happened so abruptly without the influence of World War II?

What should art be to the viewer? Is it purely aesthetic perfection in absence of Abstract Expressionistic influence?

Make broad generalizations about the topic and the discussion:

- Abstract Expressionism liberated artists from the confines of how color schemes and the elements of line should be applied to artwork (through the rejection of realism).

- With the rise of Abstract Expressionism, art became more personal and dealt with the artist's interaction with the canvas instead of pure realism.
- The movement liberated artists and allowed them to portray human angst and existence in the realest way possible without propaganda to hinder it (an indictment of social realism).
- Abstract Expressionism centered its focus on the question of "what can be determined as art".

Phase 3: Assessment (students & teacher reflect on learning)

I will have a short question and answer segment here that deals with:

- Assessment of some of the themes of Abstract Expressionist art
- Recalling influential Abstract Expressionist artists and their works

Here is what an assessment quiz would look like for this lesson (this would be done a couple days after the end of instruction):

Sample Abstract Expressionism Assessment Quiz (answers can be found in the notes section of this thesis paper)

Circle the correct letter for each question.

1. When did the Abstract Expressionist movement start?

- a. 1800s
- b. 1560s
- c. 1940's
- d. 1470's

2. Which one of these men was an Abstract Expressionist Artist?

- a. Jackson Pollock
- b. Vincent Van Gogh
- c. Grand Wood
- d. Paul Cezanne

3. The artists in the New York School of Modern Art worked for the government during the 1940's. Under what program did they work?

- a. Federal Scholastic Fund
- b. Federal Art Project
- c. National Institution of the Arts
- d. The Arts Workshop

4. What artistic method did Hans Hoffman use to create perception in his artworks?

- a. Hatching
- b. Sketching
- c. Engraving
- d. Push and Pull

5. What is the name of this work of art?



- a. Elegy to the Spanish Republic
- b. American Gothic
- c. The Gate
- d. Mountains and Sea

Circle True or False for each question.

6. T or F Abstract Expressionism began in Paris, France.

7. T or F Abstract Expressionist art was inspired by the philosophy of existentialism.

Complete the questions presented in short answer form. They must each be at least 3 sentences each.

8. Name three themes found in Abstract Expressionist Art.

9. Explain what an action painting is and who came up with the idea.

10. What themes did American artists primarily focus on before the Abstract Expressionist era?

Abstract Expressionism Quiz Key

Circle the correct letter for each question.

1. When did the Abstract Expressionist movement start?

- e. 1800s
- f. 1560s
- g. 1940's**
- h. 1470's

2. Which one of these men was an Abstract Expressionist Artist?

- e. Jackson Pollock**
- f. Vincent Van Gogh
- g. Grand Wood
- h. Paul Cezanne

3. The artists in the New York School of modern art worked for the government during the 1940's. Under what program did they work?

- e. Federal Scholastic Fund
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Circle True or False for each question.

6. T or F Abstract Expressionism began in Paris, France.

7. T or F Abstract Expressionist art was inspired by the philosophy of existentialism.

Complete the questions presented in short answer form. They must each be at least 3 sentences each.

8. Name three themes found in Abstract Expressionist Art.

Existential angst

The desire to reveal the personal

The desire to break away from rigid artistic structures

9. Explain what an action painting is and who came up with the idea.

Jackson Pollock came up with the idea.

Action painting showcased a dance around the canvas .

The artist would spontaneously drip paint onto the canvas.

10. What themes did American artists primarily focus on before the Abstract Expressionist era?

Idealized Realism

Idealized portraits of America

Rural life

For this lesson plan, I have also included everything that I would want to present to the students on Abstract Expressionism. The class notes would be transferred to PowerPoint presentations in the classroom. These notes are the example of how I would actually structure the subject matter in class so that students can understand the concept of Abstract Expressionism (using the structure of the integrated model):

Notes for lesson plan on Abstract Expressionism (liberation)

One of the most fundamental questions that have been asked and continually redefined in the area of art history is the question of what makes something a work of art. This question is brought into the forefront of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

Rise of the Abstract Expressionist Movement

The Abstract Expressionist movement grew out of the New York School of Modern Art. The New York School was the moniker for a group of influential artists that were part of the Abstract Expressionist movement, which included individuals such as William De Kooning, Hans Hoffman, and Jackson Pollock. The artists in the New York School also worked for the federal government under the Federal Art Project (which lasted from 1938-1942). This project was a government program created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to provide work

opportunities for individuals in artistic fields. The commissioning of these artists eventually turned New York City into the biggest cultural center in the world.

Abstract Expressionism and the Liberation of the Personal (existentialism)

One of the defining hallmarks of the Abstract Expressionists of the early 1940s was the desire to look to one's self for meaning and understanding in a very cruel, isolated world. This type of existentialist philosophy (or desire to understand the self) rose up from the ashes of half a century of war, (World War I and World War II) suffering, (in the form of the Holocaust) and propaganda in the form of social realism. This breakaway from social realism led the abstract expressionists to internalize their compositions and give them a meaning that was fully abstracted from the general audience.

This focus on the personal in Abstract Expressionist art was noted by art historical scholars such as Robert C. Hobbs. In his article entitled *Early Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism* (in which he analyzes the early beginnings of the Abstract Expressionist movement), he notes that "The Abstract Expressionists of the 1940s were concerned less with clinically explaining the mind than with learning to play on their hunches."⁵ The importance of the unconscious (as explained by Hobbs) was a big part of the Abstract Expressionists' attempt to internalize the aesthetics of a work of art.

However, the evolution of the artist in the realm of the personal was a gradual process. Right before the Abstract Expressionist era, many American artists had a very regional and rustic

⁵ Robert C. Hobbs. "Early Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism" *Art Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4, *The Visionary Impulse: An American Tendency* (Winter, 1985) , pp. 299-302

view of America, and expressed these biases through their artworks. While these “regional” artists were still concerned with painting realistically (with attention paid to proportionality and complex color schemes), they were focused on portraying regular Americans living their everyday lives. For the regional painter, art served as a form of showing realism through an idealized lens. Art historian Willis H. Truitt, in his article entitled *Realism*, explained how social realism played a part in defining the artist. He claims that the “Realist theory of art does not necessarily claim that art mirrors the world, but rather that artists construct symbolic reflection of their environment.”⁶ Because of this emphasis on reflection, the type of art that the regional realists created was representational in nature. One of the most famous regionalist artists of this pre-abstract expressionist era was Grant Wood. Wood was well known for painting scenes and portraits from America’s rural heartland. One of his most famous paintings, entitled *American Gothic* (shown below) depicts an old farmer and his daughter in front of what appears to be their home:



Grant Wood
American Gothic (1930)
Oil on Beaver Board

⁶ Willis H. Truitt “Realism” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* , Vol. 37, No. 2 (Winter, 1978) , pp. 141-148

The rural nature of this painting is implied by the pitchfork that the man in this portrait is holding, which seems to be a marker of his status as a hard-laborer.

Another Pre-abstract Expressionist artist that emphasized every day American life was Ben Shahn. However, Ben Shahn took the idea of representing American life into the realms of political activism. And this uniquely American style of political activism fit in well with Ben Shahn's leftist views. Between the years of 1931 and 1932 Ben Shahn (1898–1969) decided to create a series of tempera paintings that detailed the famous trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1920. Sacco and Vanzetti were two men that were arrested in 1920 and charged with attempted robbery and murder of a guard at a shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts. Both of the men charged were Italian immigrants and known anarchists. And many people felt that these two attributes played a very large role in the trial and case against their innocence instead of any actual evidence against them. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927 to much controversy, and the trial was one of the most closely watched cases in the 1920s. Because of this trial, Ben Shahn, a sympathizer to Sacco and Vanzetti, created dozens of paintings recognizing and essentially eulogizing the two men. One of his paintings is shown below and was titled *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* as part of a series of works all dealing with this trial:



Ben Shahn
The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti
1931–32
Tempera on canvas

In this painting, there are two mourners besides the graves of Sacco and Vanzetti with flowers in their hands as a symbol of their remembrance of the men and their presumed innocence. The emotional trauma of this particular trial stayed with Ben Shahn up until 1967, when he was still creating paintings that dealt with this topic.

However, during the Abstract Expressionist movement, this realistic rendering of the political and personal was broken down, or minimalized, into the symbolic. Ann Gibson's article entitled *Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language* tried to examine how Abstract Expressionists communicated the personal and symbolic through their art. She says that "Abstract Expressionists resisted the idea that language was inevitably meshed with every mode

of apprehending the world.”⁷ And one of the most famous Abstract Expressionist artists who showed this representational symbolism in their work was Robert Motherwell.

Many of Motherwell’s works showed the existential angst of the Abstract Expressionists in an attempt to create language through artistic expression. Motherwell’s painting pictured below, entitled *Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 110*, is a great example of this personal symbolism through art:



Robert Motherwell
Elegy to the Spanish Republic
1971
Oil on canvas

As a memorial to the people who died in the brutal Spanish civil war in the 1930s, Motherwell created this painting as an allusion to human mortality. The black bulbous shapes in the painting show the extent of human loss against the heroic resistance of the long strokes of black in the middle. These black shapes are placed on a white, chilly background which represented the vulnerability of human life. In a sense, Motherwell sought to use art like this to paint visual metaphors that represented human vulnerability on a tragic scale while also attempting to define the self in isolated terms.

⁷ Ann Gibson “Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language” *Art Journal* , Vol. 47, No. 3, *New Myths for Old: Redefining Abstract Expressionism* (Autumn, 1988) , pp. 208-214

Clyfford Still was another artist who was inspired by the philosophy of existentialism (discovering meaning) and the idea of universal consciousness. In his work entitled *D No. 1*, Still sought to also discover meaning through visual metaphors:



Clyfford Still
1957-D, NO. 1
Oil on canvas

This raw painting was described by Still himself as being spiritual in nature. The raw emotion of the composition is expressed through the jagged yellows on top of black color that seem to clash with each other. This finished work of art (like many of Still's works) represents the struggle of the spirit against nature's forces. All of the colors and placements in this work mesh together in an attempt to create abstracted emotion, further highlighting the Abstract Expressionist's goal at turning art into a manifestation of personal struggles to find meaning through the canvas.

Abstract Expressionism and the Liberation of the Aesthetic (color)

Abstract Expressionism also changed the way color presented itself aesthetically in art. This process of color as the abstract had its roots in the Impressionistic period of the 19th century. Lionello Venturi, in his article entitled *The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism*, seems to have captured the artistic style of Impressionism that will be a precursor to the further minimalization of realistic art. He says that Impressionists:

“saw everything not in abstract form, not in chiaro-scuro, but in reaction to the influx of light, either the real or imaginary. They [The Impressionists] had selected only one element from reality-light-to interpret all of nature.”⁸

Creating compositions based on light and broad brush strokes would be a trademark of artists like Vincent Van Gogh. An Impressionistic icon of the 19th century, Van Gogh helped refine the use of bold colors in his works. In one of his pieces entitled *Starry Night*, you can already see the use of bold colors and broad brushstrokes that would be a trademark of the 19th century Impressionist artists’ painting style, from the pronounced dark brush that dot the landscape of this painting to the bright yellows and blues that illuminate the night sky:

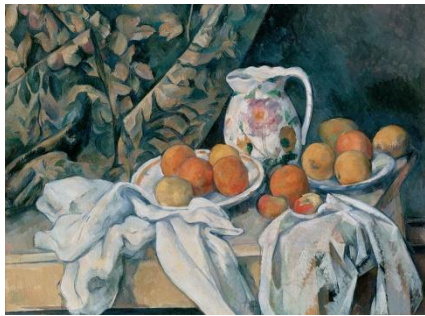


Vincent van Gogh
Starry night
1889
Oil on Canvas

This Impressionistic and bold art style will go on to be simplified and broken down to its basic form by the Abstract Expressionists.

⁸ Lionello Venturi “The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1941) , pp. 34-45

Paul Cézanne was another Impressionist painter of the 19th century that used broad brush strokes and pronounced textures in his works. In one of his paintings below called *Still Life with a Curtain*, he employs colors such as yellow and orange to help bring out the elements of art that he wanted the audience to focus on, which were the peaches that dotted the table in this composition:



Paul Cézanne
Still life with a curtain
1898
Oil on canvas

However, this focus on color and its manipulation in art was broken down further by the Abstract Expressionist. Hans Hoffman was one of the Abstract Expressionists that used color as a way to create perception in his works. The specific technique that Hans Hoffman used was called “Push and Pull”, which was an art technique that required Hoffman to use blocks of color to create the perception of depth. For example, in one of his works entitled *The Gate*, he used bright colors such as yellow to stand out in the front of the composition (shown below):



Hans Hoffman
The Gate
1959-1960
Oil on canvas

However, the dark blues in this composition seem to recede into the painting. Through this use of color, Hoffman was able to create contrasts in perception which became a big part of the Abstract Expressionist style of breaking down color to its most basic aesthetical form.

Abstract Expressionism and the Liberation of the Aesthetic (process)

The evolution of the Abstract Expressionist artist through aesthetics also delved into the concept of process and how it was used in art. For the Abstract Expressionist, process became more important than the creation itself. The means more important than the end. It was not very uncommon to see Abstract Expressionists personally leave marks and scratches in their works to show their audience the process of the created piece. Art became an experience during this period instead of a subject driven endeavor. Perhaps the most famous example of process prominence in Abstract Expressionism came from Jackson Pollock, one of the most prominent painters of the 20th century. His works, called action paintings, showcased a dance around the

canvas in which the artist spontaneously dripped paint onto the canvas. An example of this “action painting” is shown below in Jackson Pollock’s work named *No. 5*:



Jackson Pollock
No. 5
1948
Oil on fiberboard

This procedure of creating art was revolutionary. With his action paintings, Jackson Pollock attempted to create paintings that were aesthetic experiences, in a break from the subject driven paintings of his artistic predecessors such as Grant Wood.

Catherine M. Soussloff, in her article entitled *Jackson Pollock's Post-Ritual Performance: Memories Arrested in Space* notes Jackson’s Pollock’s use of action painting to create process into a work of art. She says that “Pollock’s corpeal rhythm should not be considered ordered or systemic, but its presence in the abstractions lends weight to the performative poetics of the paintings.”⁹ For Jackson Pollock, the meaning of art expanded from the composition to the very gesture (motion) of the artist holding the brush.

⁹ Catherine M. Soussloff “Jackson Pollock's Post-Ritual Performance: Memories Arrested in Space” TDR (1988-), Vol. 48, No. 1 (Spring, 2004) , pp. 60-78

Another Abstract Expressionist that focused on process was Helen Frankenthaler. Frankenthaler not only made her presence known in this period as being one of the most prominent female Abstract Expressionists of the time, but also was known for her unique painting style. Frankenthaler wanted her colors on the canvas to appear pale and to look like washes (in the same way diluted watercolor paint would look on paper). These “washes”, in her perspective, would give the painting she was creating a much more free-flowing and spontaneous dynamic. One of her most famous paintings that showcased her process of applying color is called *Mountains and Sea*:



Helen Frankenthaler
Mountains and Sea,
1952
oil and charcoal on canvas

This work, which was inspired by Frankenthaler’s trip to Nova Scotia, is a composition that is filled with washes of color portrayed through pale blues, reds, and grays. The entire painting was done with oil paint and a liberal amount of paint thinner to create transparency in colors that seem to come together and collide with each other. As with most of Frankenthaler’s works, this painting was designed to not look self creating. In an interview with Barbara Rose, Frankenthaler helped explain the idea of creating self regulating works by saying:

"A really good picture looks as if it's happened at once. It's an immediate image. For my own work, when a picture looks labored and overworked, and you can read in it—well, she did this and then she did that, and then she did that—there is something in it that has not got to do with beautiful art to me. And I usually throw these out, though I think very often it takes ten of those over-labored efforts to produce one really beautiful wrist motion that is synchronized with your head and heart, and you have it, and therefore it looks as if it were born in a minute."¹⁰

Abstract Expressionism and the Liberation of the Minimal

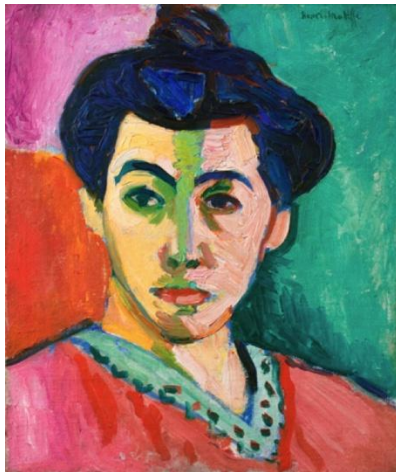
Another area in which the Abstract Expressionists were liberated from their predecessors was in their heavy use of minimalist concepts in their work. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines Minimalism as “a movement originating in New York City that is characterized by extreme simplicity of form and a literal objective approach to art.” Leon Golub, in his article entitled *A Critique of Abstract Expressionism*, points out the connection between minimalism as a definition and the art styles of the Abstract Expressionists. He says that “In a way, Abstract Expressionism was a very good thing indeed and included the intensity of personal commitments without the specificity such a view ordinarily entails.”¹¹ The need of the Abstract Expressionist to focus more on the personal without being weighed down by realism is a big part of why the Abstract Expressionist movement was so revolutionary for its time. This type of Minimalist art emphasized the breaking down of design elements to their basic forms. This means that instead

¹⁰ Barbara Rose, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1975, p. 85)

¹¹ Leon Golub “A Critique of Abstract Expressionism” *College Art Journal* , Vol. 14, No. 2 (Winter, 1955) , pp. 142-147

of line and color being meshed together to show an overall composition, line and color would be shown in their most pure and primary forms in the art presented.

The bond between minimalism and Abstract Expressionism will completely change the way artists applied linear elements into their works. But the change did not start right away. The standard rule of applying line and proportion in art can be traced back to the Fauvist movement of the 1920s. The Fauvists created works of art that were defined by bold colors and painterly qualities. These works were a gradual step away from the representational art that still defined the artworks of the Impressionistic period. One of the most famous Fauvist artists was Henri Matisse. In one of his artworks (entitled *The Green Line*) you can see the loose brushstrokes and solid colors that helps make the woman in this work of art stand out, from the blue color that acts as a signifier of hair to the green lines in the middle of the woman's head that separate the left and right side of the woman's face:



Henri Matisse
The Green Line
1906
Oil and tempera on canvas

Even with Henri Matisse's radical new way of using lines and shapes on the canvas, there was still a sense of technical detail and loose realism associated with his work. With the Abstract

Expressionist movement, this centuries old view of using line will be challenged through minimalism.

Frank Stella is probably one of the most prominent artists to use line and pattern as a minimalized form of his work in the Abstract Expressionist period. Frank Stella was one of the minimalists of the Abstract Expressionist movement who focused on the objective nature of the picture represented on the canvas, instead of a meaning to what is being painted. This led Stella to use canvases shaped in irregular geometric shapes and form to paint on. Many of the works Stella created exaggerate shapes and colors to create a very basic, minimalistic composition. In Stella's painting entitled *Harran II* (shown below), Stella shows the attention he paid to linear and geometric shapes through the use of grey, orange, and purple lines:



Frank Stella
Harran II
1967
Polymer and fluorescent
polymer paint on canvas

The lines of this work create shapes that mesh together, such as squares and quarter-circle shapes, which all in turn create strange and unique shapes as a whole composition.

The embrace of minimalism by the Abstract Expressionists also led to increased experimentation in the visual arts world. Lynne Cooke, in her journal article entitled *Minimalism*, reviewed attempts to get a firm understanding of how Minimalism affected the art of the Post World War II era, which was heavily influenced by Abstract Expressionism. In this article, she

says that “Minimalism set out to test the limits of art and it sought to clarify the terms in which art takes place in the world.”¹² So what were these “limits” that art was trying to test? One may be able to find the answer in the Abstract Expressionist artist’s use of sculptures to apply their minimalist preferences to.

Picasso started the process of minimalist sculpture through the use of cubism in his works. He paid close attention to creating geometric shapes and pronounced lines to create works of art. In his artwork below entitled *She Goat*, you can see the curve of the back of the goat (created using ceramic and metal scraps) outlined with strong deep lines, and the entire body seems to have an angular feel to it:



Pablo Picasso
She-Goat
1952
Bronze

¹² Lynne Cooke “Minimalism Reviewed” *The Burlington Magazine* , Vol. 131, No. 1038 (Sep., 1989) , pp. 641-645

Picasso's goal was not to create a smooth work of art, but works that feel like rough, angular carvings. It was supposed to contain pronounced shapes, very much like his paintings (which had this same type of style to them).

David Smith, an Abstract Expressionist, took Picasso's view of geometric sculpture and broke it down further into a more minimal context. This is shown in his sculpture named *The Royal Bird*:



David Smith
The Royal Bird
(1947)
Bronze and stainless steel

The viewer can clearly see that this work is an outline of some flying creature, and has a rib cage in the middle, with a skeletal structure for wings (with the claws at the far right). This simple work was designed to emphasize linear qualities joined together to create a composition. And further shows the minimalization of art that became a trademark of Abstract Expressionist art.

Conclusion for these instructional notes:

The ability for artists to not be shackled by strict realistic standards for popular art became one of the calling cards of the Abstract Expressionist movement. The artist, liberated from a bygone era which depended on artists to capture events before the invention of the camera, was now able to freely express themselves through the canvas. And this freedom culminated in one of the purest forms of artistic expression that was ever seen in the Past World War II era. From the

information I gathered about the nature of the Abstract Expressionists of the early 20th century, I was able to gain a deeper insight into the importance of the movement they belonged to. Abstract Expressionism liberated artists by allowing them to express the elements and principles of art on the canvas in their own non-technical styles that did not have to be dipped in obvious realism. It also allowed them to place the process of creating art over the actual finished product. And Abstract Expressionism also allowed artists to bring back the elements of art to their purest forms on the canvas. After many years of slowly abstracted art work coming into the forefront of the Post World War II era in America, the Abstract Expressionist movement allowed artists express themselves freely. Because of this newfound artistic freedom, the issue no longer became what art was supposed to be, but how many different ways art can be interpreted, from the internal to the external.

Conclusion to Thesis Paper

In the 1980s, there was a renewed concern for excellence in education in America because of the economic and technological growth of 2nd and 3rd world countries. There was a large report created by the National Commission of Excellence in Education (entitled *A Nation At Risk*) which sought to restore academic excellence in the classroom in order to stay intellectually competitive with other countries.

However, national reports such as the one commissioned by the NCEE (National Commission of Excellence in Education) generally tended to leave art education in the background as a secondary subject. This void caused the National Art Education Association (NAEA) to remedy this deficiency. In 1987, Ralph Smith, an art educational scholar (commissioned by the NAEA), wrote a report entitled “Excellence in Art Education: Ideas and Initiatives”, which was designed to focus on the goals of art education. One of the most important statements Smith outlined in his report was the importance of analytical thinking of historical artworks in the classroom as opposed to just making art class an outlet for “self expression”¹³ in the artistic creative process.

Smith understood that the rigorous focus on application in art class and the rejection of art history in the classroom was a detriment to students in America. Throwing out art history from the art curriculum means that very few students will get a chance to gain a solid understanding of the background and influences of the artwork that they create. Because of the void in art history education in America’s schools, models must be created to give teachers a

¹³ Efland, Arthur. *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts*. New York: Teachers College, 1990. Print.

way to help reach students through art history. This is where the Integrated Model instruction strategy comes into play. The integrated model allows teachers to engage students with the material by linking different concepts through contrasts and comparisons, and making generalizations about the main concept (Abstract Expressionism) through these links. Teachers only have a limited amount of time in the classroom to talk about very exhaustive topics, but I believe that I can use the Integrated Model to sufficiently cover what I want to teach in this one small area of art history.

I would also add that careful analysis of any type of art deemed unrealistic or indecipherable tends to be ignored by students who may not understand modern art at face value. The goal of my research paper is to give the audience a more reasoned perspective on modern art like Abstract Expressionism. And I hope that the strategies and models I present in this paper can help students and teachers broaden their scope of what art can be through instructional strategies such as the integrative model.

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